

Even in death you can be eco-friendly

BY STEVEN POWELL
Bainbridge Island Review

Many people who live on Bainbridge Island care about the environment. Now they can when they die, too.

The Cook Family Funeral Home recently became certified by the national Green Burial Council. Factoring in COVID-19 restrictions, that has meant a lot of changes this year.

"We're trying to reduce our environmental impact," funeral director Tim Dinan said of offering green and ecofriendly burials along with traditional ones.

He and his wife Alison bought the business a few years ago with that in mind, along with Hillcrest Cemetery just a little bit later. The memorial park is "tranquil, peaceful," he said, adding many people don't even know it's there because markers are flat, not sticking up out of the ground. "When you drive by it looks like a park or open space."

Dinan said green burials are a new trend that he knows will be popular on BI because it's "environmentally conscious - more so here than a lot of other areas. It's the desire of families to care for their own in the most natural way possible."

Green burial

There are many options but the most all-encompassing is a green burial in a special section at Hillcrest. It doesn't involve embalming, a casket, a vault or a traditional marker. Remains are placed directly in the soil, covered and mounded. Seeds can be planted on top so it grows back in its natural state.

"There are no manmade artificial products or chemicals introduced into the earth," Dinan said.

Another option is to wrap the body in a linen shroud and place it on cedar branches into the grave. Dinan said that's how it was done many, many years ago.

"Nature takes care of the remains over time," he said. "Back to the earth. It's the most natural form of disposition available," he said, adding to keep it natural those graves are hand dug. "We don't even want it to be a manicured part of the cemetery."

At first, they weren't going to allow headstones there, just a "rock or some homemade thing." But because military veterans get a free headstone from the government, "We don't want to stop them from having that," Dinan said.

He added that some people think cemeteries are a waste of land. So Dinan offers green burial graves where as many as eight family members can be interred in urns.

"Why not use the land to get the most out of it?" he asked.

Other options include hand-made ecofriendly caskets and urns. He just recently started working with a company that turns cremated remains into stone.

"It's a nice way to get cremated remains back," he said.

Finally, Dinan offers flameless cremation, using water instead.

Called aquamation, water and an alkaline solution break down



Above: Natural willow casket. Below: Remains wrapped in linen shroud with cedar planks below.

"There are no manmade artificial products or chemicals introduced into the earth."

Tim Dinan
funeral director

the body so no carbon is released in flames. Dinan said the family gets more remains back using that method.

"For years it's been used in the medical field to dispose of amputated arms," he said.

Dinan said he likes the green movement, even though he has 32 years experience and is a fourth generation funeral director.

"I've never been locked into a certain way of doing things," he said, adding the green burial designation means he follows best practices for environmental safety.

COVID protocols

Of course, like everyone else funeral homes have had changing coronavirus protocols throughout the year.

"It's been really hard on families" because for some of the time they couldn't say goodbye to their loved ones, especially if they had to travel, Dinan said, adding they tried to help by taking videos and photos.

But funeral homes are very old-fashioned, and COVID has led to some positive changes - especially with technology.

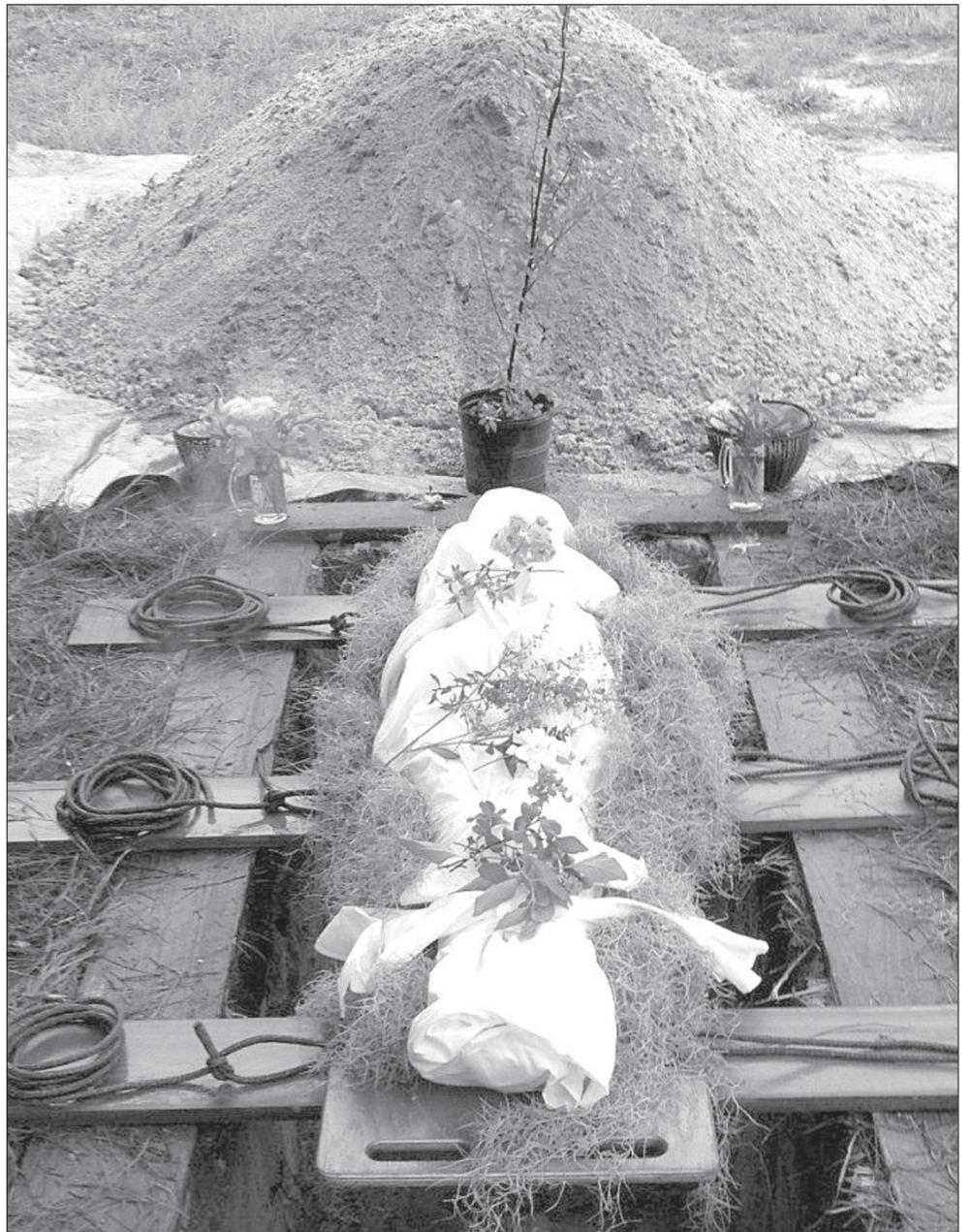
The biggest one is probably livestreaming events people used to be able to attend, such as viewings.

"You can have a private time with your loved one from the safety of your own home," Dinan said.

They can also livestream services from their website.

Their website also has been upgraded so all arrangements can be done online so there is no paperwork. There is even a drive-up option where cremation or aquamation remains are brought to the car.

In Gov. Jay Inslee's latest announcement, Dinan said up to 30 people are allowed at a cemetery, with 25 percent of capacity



allowed in an indoor ceremony. Don't go if you have a fever or symptoms, stay 6 feet apart and wear a mask.

Despite that, Dinan said: "A lot of folks are afraid. They don't want to" attend any ceremony. "We want to make sure people are safe. It's changed our profession completely."

Fast facts

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Hillcrest is the only cemetery in Kitsap County certified by the Green Burial Council. Built in 1958, it is located at 1450 Old Mill Road.



A pine siskin.

Courtesy photo

Take down feeders; birds dying of salmonella

KITSAP NEWS GROUP

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife is recommending that people in Kitsap County and elsewhere temporarily discontinue feeding wild birds as there have been reports of sick or dead birds in backyard feeders.

The die-off of finches - such as pine siskins - as well as other songbirds is attributed to salmonellosis, a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the salmonella bacteria, DFW veterinarian Kristin Mansfield said.

"When birds flock together in large numbers at feeders, they can transmit the disease through droppings

and saliva," she said.

Laurie Spickard of Port Madison they have found a dozen dead pine siskins out there.

The spread of the disease could be exacerbated because finches and other species that generally winter in Canada move south and are spotted in larger numbers.

"The first indication of the disease for bird watchers to look for is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. The birds become very lethargic, fluff out their feathers, and are easy to approach. This kind of behavior is generally uncommon to birds," Mansfield said. "Unfortunately, at this point

there is very little people can do to treat them. The best course is to leave the birds alone."

The public can help by discontinuing backyard bird feeding until at least February, to encourage birds to disperse and forage naturally.

"Birds use natural food sources year-round, even while also using backyard bird feeders, so they should be fine without the feeders," Mansfield said.

Those who choose not to discontinue wild bird feeding are encouraged to clean feeders daily by rinsing the feeder well with warm soapy water, then dunking in a solution of nine parts water and one part bleach. Finish

by rinsing and drying before refilling. Keep the ground below the feeder clean by raking or shoveling up feces and seed casings.

People are also asked to reduce the number of feeders, use feeders that accommodate fewer birds and spread out feeder locations. Keeping bird baths and fountains clean is also important.

When handling birds, bird feeders or bird baths, it is best to wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly afterward.

DFW is asking the public to report dead birds online and avoid handling them.

For details go to wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation.